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THE following Address was presented to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, as representing Her Majesty the Queen, on the occasion of the laying of the Foundation Stone of the new Post Office Savings Bank Buildings at Kensington on the 24th instant:—

The Right Honourable Sir Matthew White Ridley, Bart., Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, was in attendance on His Royal Highness.

May it please Your Royal Highness,

THE Building of which Your Royal Highness has graciously consented to lay the first stone to-day has been rendered necessary by the continued development of the Post Office Savings Bank, which was first established in 1851, and the growth of which may be regarded as one of the most notable features in the history of the country during the latter half of the present century.

Although the idea of utilizing the organization of the Post Office for the purpose of receiving deposits had engaged the attention of many persons since the year 1807, it was mainly through the exertions of Sir Charles Sikes, of Huddersfield, that the scheme was first brought prominently before the Government and the public. It was urged that in order to promote habits of thrift it was necessary not only to bring to every man's door facilities for depositing even the smallest sums of money, but to provide him with unquestionable security for his investment; and it was felt that few agencies could attain these objects so easily and so efficiently as a Government Department which had offices and officers in almost every town and village throughout the United Kingdom.

It was not, however, until the support of Mr. Gladstone had been enlisted in favour of the idea that any substantial progress was made towards its realization. Even then many serious difficulties remained to be overcome, but eventually, with the aid of the practical experience of Mr. Scudamore and Mr. Chetwynd, at that time two of the principal officers of the Post Office, a plan was elaborated. The scheme of these officers formed the basis of a Bill, which was introduced into the House of Commons by Mr. Gladstone, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, in February, 1861. With a few trifling alterations the Bill was accepted and became law in May, and the business of the Bank was commenced in the following September.

From the outset the system has worked with perfect smoothness and precision. Though slight improvements in detail have been made from time to time, no serious fault has ever been found in the machinery of the Bank as originally devised, and in its main features that machinery is the same now as on the day when the first deposit was received.

So conspicuous an example of successful organization has attracted the attention of other countries, and savings banks, on identical principles, have been established in many parts of the world, both in Her Majesty's dominions and in foreign countries.

The growth of the business of the Post Office Savings Bank has been remarkable. At the end of the first ten years there were fifteen hundred thousand depositors with a balance of £19,000,000 to their credit. At the end of 20 years the figures had doubled, and now after 37 years there are nearly eight millions of depositors with a balance of £123,000,000. The number of offices at which deposits can be made or withdrawn is upwards of 12,000; and it may be mentioned as an illustration of the strong hold which the institution has gained upon the population, that one out of every five persons in the United Kingdom is now a depositor. It has been calculated that about four-fifths of the depositors belong to the working classes.

One of the most striking features of the business is the number of small transactions with which the Department has to deal. Since the Bank was started, as many as two hundred millions of deposits have been received, a great proportion being under 5s. Every transaction is recorded in the books of the Central Office, and involves a direct communication with the depositor.

While the main outlines of the system remain the same as at the beginning, the scope of the business has been extended in several ways, the most important additions being the provisions for making investments in Government Stock on behalf of depositors and for enabling depositors to insure their lives and purchase Government Annuities through the agency of the Post Office.

The staff of the Central Office now numbers 2,650, of whom no less than 1,100 are women, and the continued growth of the business has rendered an enlargement of the building necessary on several occasions.

The existing premises in Queen Victoria-street are incapable of further extension, save at a very heavy expenditure, and efforts have therefore